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If you have a news item or photo you would like to submit, email the editor at:

April.Crowley@flhealth.gov

# Hepatitis Update

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 3

AUGUST 2015

## Hepatitis Outreach in Lee County

By Michele Savage

In honor of Hepatitis Awareness Month and National Hepatitis Testing Day, staff from the Florida Department of Health in Lee County spent May 19 at St. John the Apostle Church. We not only provided hepatitis testing and vaccines, we also offered testing for HIV and STDs. It was an opportunity to educate the public about communicable diseases. There were many attendees, and we considered it a very successful event!



Left to right: Lisi Mendoza, Gene Krall, Michele Savage, and Jude Jean-Pierre. Not pictured: Khalidah Dacary.

## IAC Updates Hepatitis B and Health Care Personnel

<http://www.immunize.org>

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) recently updated the publication *Hepatitis B and Healthcare Personnel (HCP): CDC answers frequently asked questions about how to protect health care personnel*. Topics include: hepatitis B (HBV) vaccination, post-vaccination hepatitis B surface antibody (Anti-HBs) testing, non-responders or HCP with chronic HBV Infection and post-exposure management. For more information, go to:

<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2109.pdf>.

IAC also offers free educational materials for health care professionals and the public at:

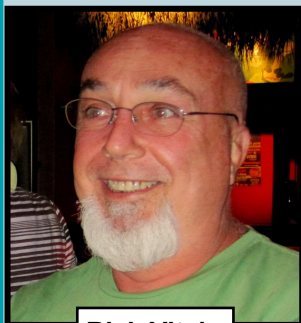
<http://www.immunize.org/handouts/>



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## New Hep C Support Group in Bay County

By Rick Vitale



Rick Vitale

The Florida Department of Health in Bay County started a hepatitis C support group that meets the second Tuesday of every month, from 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m., at 597 West 11th Street in Panama City. Each month we explore a different theme with an activity or guest speaker. Any person affected by hepatitis C is welcome to join us. Refreshments are provided.

Here are some of the things attendees learn about at the support group:

- ♦ Coping with initial diagnosis
- ♦ Healthy living with hepatitis C
- ♦ Hepatitis C treatment options
- ♦ Relationship between hepatitis C and substance abuse
- ♦ Therapeutic techniques to manage stress/anxiety
- ♦ Group member testimonials



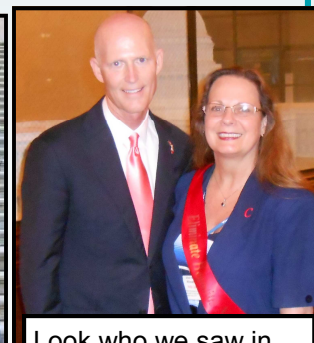
For more information, contact: Rick.Vitale@flhealth.gov, or 850-872-2244, ext. 1182.

## Hepatitis Advocates Unite! Conference

By Pam Langford

On May 10-12, I joined Kelli Lawhead from Tallahassee and Diannee Carden Glenn from Weston, in attending the Hepatitis Advocates Unite! Conference in Washington, DC. We were given an opportunity to speak with senators and congressmen from Florida about the importance of hepatitis education, prevention, treatment, and the Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2015. The conference was planned by the Caring Ambassadors Program. Executive Director Lorren Sandt and her staff scheduled 106 enthusiastic hepatitis advocates from all over the United States to meet with their local legislative offices.

Excellent speakers gave presentations about topics varying from the Viral Hepatitis Action Plan to giving us tips and education on how to be better advocates when we returned to our home states. Viral hepatitis is a winnable battle, and together we can make a difference!



Look who we saw in DC—Florida Governor Rick Scott! He was very gracious & posed for a photo with Kelli Lawhead.

**Editor's Note:** Pam Langford is the president of HEALS of the South (Hepatitis Education & Liver Support) in Tallahassee. That's Pam in the middle of the front row dressed in lavender.

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## Viral Hepatitis News from CDC



### MMWR - Identification and Linkage to Care of HCV-Infected Persons in Five Health Centers — Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2012–2014

This report describes strategies for integrating HCV testing into primary care settings.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6417a3.htm>

### Prevent Hepatitis A: Get Vaccinated Before You Travel

Hepatitis A is common in many parts of the world, particularly in some popular travel destinations such as Mexico and Central and South America. CDC released an advisory for people traveling to Tulum, Mexico, as public health officials have recently identified 28 cases of hepatitis A in 12 states as of the end of April. Unvaccinated travelers to Tulum and other areas where hepatitis A is common are at risk of becoming infected with the virus. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepAVaccinationBeforeTravel.htm>

### Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis – United States, 2013

CDC released the 2013 Viral Hepatitis Surveillance Report, which provides data on the number of new cases of hepatitis A, B and C, as well as data to inform our understanding of the current epidemiology of chronic hepatitis B and C in the United States. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/Statistics/2013Surveillance/index.htm>

## Cutting-Edge Hepatitis Surveillance Tools Enhance Reporting in Florida

DOH Communications Office Press Release

Hepatitis C in Florida continues to be a public health concern requiring a comprehensive statewide approach. Since 2011, as part of an enhanced surveillance project for hepatitis, the Florida Department of Health has developed surveillance tools for hepatitis—an approach that puts Florida at the forefront of surveillance for identification of reported hepatitis in the U.S.



The Department developed tools to take advantage of the availability of electronic laboratory results and has since processed approximately 650,000 electronic laboratory results for hepatitis in 2014. This enhancement improved the quality of reporting, while reducing reporting time across the state. Florida's ability to more accurately capture hepatitis cases that were previously unidentified provides a clearer picture of the burden of hepatitis in Florida.

As the Department continues to educate, assess and ultimately prevent hepatitis morbidity throughout the state, further enhancements to the hepatitis surveillance system will target improved linkage of hepatitis clients to care.

In an effort to educate the public on hepatitis C, the Florida Department of Health has launched a new webpage to provide educational materials regarding this disease. The webpage at:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/hepatitis/hepatitis-c.html>

contains background information on the disease, downloadable broadcast-quality video, and a "frequently asked questions" section.

DOH encourages Florida residents to learn about hepatitis C and to take the proper precautions to protect themselves.



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## Love the Golden Rule/HepatitisMain Highlights

By Gordon Licata

Greetings from St. Petersburg. Since November 2014, we have seen 510 clients who tested positive for hepatitis C (HCV) at health departments, blood banks, plasma centers and hospitals. Every patient has met with Dr. Bob (Robert Wallace, MD) or me for education and patient assistance.



Gordon Licata

We recently began using OraQuick rapid HCV tests, which enables us to deliver an accurate diagnosis in 20 minutes.

Liver biopsies have been replaced by Fibrosure, a blood test, and Fibroscan, which is an ultrasound scan. Both of these non-invasive procedures have the same prognostic value as a liver biopsy and can determine the degree of liver damage in people with HCV.

Between October 2014-June 2015, we treated 71 people for hepatitis C. Six months after completion of treatment, viral loads will be done to check sustained viral response. We have been able to provide many of these viral load tests for free, or at a reduced rate.

Love the Golden Rule and HepatitisMain are located at 721 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street South in St. Petersburg, Florida. Both community-based, non-profit organizations provide hepatitis C services to individuals in need. For more information, call or visit [HepatitisMain.com](http://HepatitisMain.com), 727-228-1670 and [lovethgoldenrule.com](http://lovethgoldenrule.com), 727-228-1650.

## World Hepatitis Day in St. Lucie

Submitted by Kimberly Kossler

On July 28, our local disease control staff, consisting of STD, HIV, and Epidemiology, collaborated to offer education and testing in recognition of World Hepatitis Day. Community partners also participated in the event to provide information and promote services.



Left to Right: Jamie Sabins-STD Disease Intervention Specialist (DIS), Ariel Alonso-STD DIS, Monica Illuzzi-STD Program Manager, and Sindie Belizaire-STD DIS/Surveillance



Above is just a small sample of some of the educational materials we distributed.

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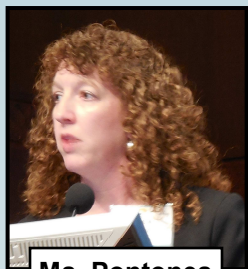
## Summit on Stopping HCV Transmission in Young PWID

By Phil Reichert

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Viral Hepatitis Action Coalition sponsored a summit to discuss halting new hepatitis C infections in young people who inject drugs (PWID) in Atlanta, July 20-21, 2015. This meeting is a direct response to an outbreak of hepatitis C, HIV and injecting drug use (IDU) by young people in southeastern Indiana and several surrounding areas in Kentucky, Ohio and other proximate areas earlier this year.



Phil Reichert



Ms. Pontones

Pam Pontones, State Epidemiologist for the Indiana Department of Health, said there were 172 new cases of hepatitis C through June of this year in Austin, Indiana, a rural town with a population of about 4,200. In addition, there were over 80 new cases of HIV. A doctor in Austin stated on a news program that young people have rediscovered heroin and other opioids, and they are injecting them and sharing their needles.

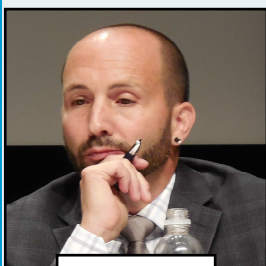
According to Scott Holmberg, a physician epidemiologist for CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis, there is a significant increase in acute hepatitis C in the U.S., most likely due to an increase in the sharing of needles and syringes for heroin and other opioids. Specifically, there was a 200 percent increase in acute hepatitis C in 30 states from 2006-2012. Most of this increase is in rural and suburban areas in people under 30 years of age. One published study showed young people are trying marijuana for the first time at an average age of 14, trying alcohol for the first time at age 15, and injecting drug use is being initiated by age 17.



Dr. Holmberg

CDC epidemiologists were able to link most of the hepatitis C cases in Austin into three clusters by genetically testing the virus in individuals, said Yury Khudyakov, a medical epidemiologist from CDC.

Michele Bohm, from CDC's injury prevention division, stated there were 16,917 deaths in 2011 due to opioid abuse in the U.S. Jon Zibbell, a researcher from CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis, added that whites abuse opioids more than communities of color and that in recent years, there has been a decline in prescription opioid use and an increase in heroin addiction. There are an equal number of acute hepatitis C cases being reported in rural and urban areas in the U.S. and nearly 69 percent of all acute hepatitis C cases in the U.S. are reported from 12 states, including Florida.



Dr. Zibbell

Dr. Zibbell suggested that we can tailor our outreach efforts based on prescription opioid use and heroin use. He said we might review local arrest records and partner with local law enforcement.

When asked why there is an increase in injecting drug use in rural areas, several of the speakers at this summit agreed there is no good single answer to the question. They did suggest we take a look at what is happening in Austin, Indiana, and the other nearby states and their rural areas, then develop plans to prevent this from happening elsewhere.

***This article is continued on page 6.***

A glimpse of the Global Communications Center at CDC in Atlanta.



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## Stopping HCV Transmission continued from page 5:

In Indiana, the governor temporarily lifted a ban on needle and syringe exchange programs for Scott County (where Austin is located) in hopes this would slow the problem of rising HIV and hepatitis C cases. As several speakers mentioned, syringe exchange sites are also places where PWIDs might be educated to stop using drugs through substance abuse treatment.

Discussions at the summit included ideas for stemming the tide of new infections due to injecting drugs and sharing needles. Certainly education and information about not sharing needles, in the absence of the unavailability of clean ones, is one answer. As proponents of HIV prevention have been teaching for decades, one level of prevention is to offer cleaning kits that include bleach and water. Ideally, substance abuse treatment is the best answer.

Several other related issues were discussed at this summit, but we will save those for a future issue of *Hepatitis Update*. For more information about the Viral Hepatitis Action Coalition, go to: <http://www.viralhepatitisaction.org>.

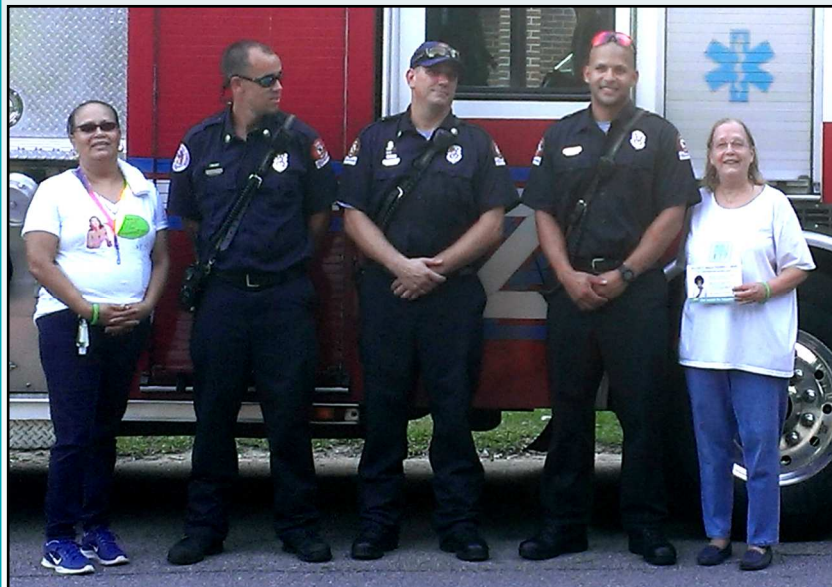
## World Hepatitis Day in Leon County

By Pam Langford

On World Hepatitis Day, HEALS of the South (Hepatitis, Education, Awareness and Liver Support) held an awareness event from 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. at Lake Ella in Tallahassee. Several of us took turns on the megaphone providing facts about hepatitis B and C for the public. We got everyone's attention by constantly stressing, "If you have blood, you are at risk for hepatitis C."

Plenty of educational materials were handed out to all different age groups. We also had organ donor cards available because viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver transplants.

Special thanks to Jesse Fry with The AIDS Institute, firefighters from the Tallahassee Fire Department, and staff from the Florida Department of Health for their participation and support.



L to R: Miriam Altieri with HEALS of the South, Lt. Nathan Roberts, Engineer Jeff Atkinson, firefighter Juan Colon, and Pam Langford with HEALS of the South



Drew Pope talked about risk factors for hepatitis C and why it's important to be tested.



Maura Comer, with the STD & Viral Hepatitis Section at the Florida DOH, answered questions about hepatitis C surveillance.

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## World Hepatitis Day in Miami-Dade County

By Marie K. Etienne

In commemoration of World Hepatitis Day, the Hepatitis Prevention Program of the Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County offered free hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines and rapid hepatitis C (HCV) screening to the registered residents of the Camillus House, a full service center offering the Continuum of Care Program for persons who are destitute and homeless.

Our team administered 27 doses of vaccines, tested 39 clients for HCV, and linked 12 chronic HCV clients to care. The team also distributed bilingual educational materials to attendees in yellow bags, inviting them to spread the World Health Organization's 2015 theme for World Hepatitis Day: "Prevent Hepatitis. Act Now." The yellow bags conveyed the message to "be concerned and to seek medical attention for sudden yellowing of the eyes or for jaundice," which, when present, is considered a symptom of acute infection due to hepatitis A, B or C.

This outreach activity focused on the importance of increasing awareness and empowering people to understand hepatitis. The team's main message to the community was to "Get Tested! Get Vaccinated!" By offering these services, we were able to help limit the spread of viral hepatitis among this at-risk population.

A round of applause goes to our entire disease control team for all their brainstorming and hard work, which greatly contributed to the success of this outreach event.



L to R: Janet Grajales, Emily Davenport, Juan Jose Estrada, Dr. Reynald Jean, and Marie K. Etienne



Anita Martinez, Hepatitis Prevention Program



Myriam Alfonso, of Hepatitis C Community Educators, chats with Dr. Jean



L to R: University of Miami MPH interns Justin Lee and Ji Li

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## Florida Hepatitis C Forum in Tampa

By Phil Reichert

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sponsored a forum of experts to discuss hepatitis C testing and treatment in Tampa on February 27, 2015. After a similar gathering in California in November 2013, CDC proposed holding similar meetings in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Florida. The AIDS Institute (TAI), which has offices in Tampa and Washington, DC, and includes a viral hepatitis prevention component in their goals, put the meeting together along with the staff of the Hepatitis Prevention Program in Tallahassee. Michael Ruppel, Executive Director of TAI, facilitated the day's activities which included topical presentations and discussions of relevant issues.

The stated objective of the meeting was, "Advance adoption and implementation of the hepatitis C birth cohort testing guidelines at the state level by engaging a cross-section of stakeholders." This meeting pulled together representatives from public health, other government agencies, the Veteran's Administration, academia, health care delivery, and the testing and treatment industry.

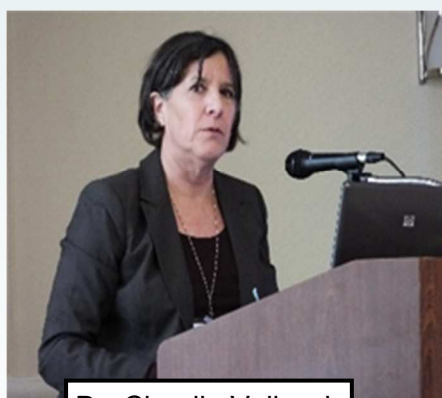
Dr. Douglas Holt, Director of the Department of Health in Hillsborough County, welcomed over 40 representatives from around Florida to the forum. I provided an overview of hepatitis C in Florida and what the county health departments are doing locally regarding testing and some limited linkage to care. Dr. Dushyantha Jayweera, a professor of clinical medicine at the University of Miami's medical school, presented on recent updates in medicines available to treat hepatitis C. Corinna Dan, who is the Viral Hepatitis Policy Advisor from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, DC, talked about the national viral hepatitis action plan written and published by HHS. Finally, Dr. Claudia Vellozzi, the Chief of the Prevention Branch at CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis, spoke about hepatitis C in the U.S. and around the world.

Several discussions during the day were: barriers to providing screening and treatment services; what resources are already available to prevent, test and treat hepatitis C; how to leverage resources from other programs; updated training for health care workers; and collaboration with partners.

The outcome of the meeting (as well as those that occurred later in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts) is a written document that will provide recommendations based on the discussions at each meeting. For a look at the presentation slides from the Florida meeting, go to <http://www.hepflorida.org/#/c3qn> (under the title, "Hepatitis C Testing Stakeholders Forum").



Dr. Dushyantha Jayweera



Dr. Claudia Vellozzi



The AIDS Institute staff, Michael Ruppel and Michelle Scavnicky



Corinna Dan



L to R: Donna Wheeler, STD & Viral Hepatitis Section, and Enid Santiago-Cruz, Florida Department of Health in Seminole County

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